
Introduced by Senator Wolk
(Coauthor: Assembly Member Dodd)

July 16, 2015

Senate Joint Resolution No. 18—Relative to small unmanned aircraft systems.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 18, as introduced, Wolk. Small unmanned aircraft systems.

This measure would request the President of the United States and the United States Secretary of Transportation to allow for the operation of small unmanned aircraft systems by farmers and rangeland managers pursuant to emergency rules adopted by the administration using its emergency powers, as specified.

Fiscal committee: no.

1 WHEREAS, In the western United States, water is a vital and
2 scarce resource, the availability of which has and continues to
3 circumscribe growth, development, economic well-being, and
4 environmental quality of life; and
5 WHEREAS, The wise use, conservation, development, and
6 management of our water resources is critical to maintaining human
7 life, health, safety, and property; and
8 WHEREAS, The western United States is currently experiencing
9 serious drought conditions that are predicted to worsen; and
10 WHEREAS, Agricultural irrigation uses a significant amount
11 of water, making the agricultural sector one of the most important
12 sectors to examine when considering water conservation; and

1 WHEREAS, Even modest improvements in agricultural water
2 use can result in significant amounts of water not being depleted
3 regionwide, which can then be utilized elsewhere; and

4 WHEREAS, Precision agricultural management studies have
5 shown that farmers can reduce the amount of water, fertilizer, and
6 pesticide needed by their fields by utilizing high-resolution,
7 high-quality remotely sensed imagery to guide their application
8 efforts of water, fertilizer, and pesticide; and

9 WHEREAS, Small unmanned aircraft systems (sUAS) have the
10 capability to quickly provide expansive, high-resolution, and
11 high-quality remotely sensed imagery that can measure specific
12 bands in the solar spectrum, such as the thermal infrared band,
13 which allows farmers to better understand and manage their water
14 use; and

15 WHEREAS, The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is
16 currently in the process of adopting rules for the usage of sUAS
17 in agricultural management; and

18 WHEREAS, Flights of sUAS, for the purposes of precision
19 agricultural management, could occur safely at low altitudes, in
20 rural areas removed from other air traffic and human populations,
21 and in accordance with the FAA's proposed guidelines; and

22 WHEREAS, sUAS have been used in precision agricultural
23 management in Japan for a decade, successfully optimizing and
24 monitoring the management of 2.5 million acres of farmland, 40
25 percent of which are rice fields, without any significant reported
26 incidents; and

27 WHEREAS, Flights of sUAS also have the capacity for detecting
28 invasive plant species that deplete high amounts of water such as
29 yellow star thistle, arundo, tamarisk, and cheatgrass, which serve
30 no agricultural purpose and removal of which would help in water
31 conservation efforts; and

32 WHEREAS, The use of sUAS is an emerging technology and
33 has great promise for the development of models that forecast and
34 predict economic impacts of droughts and meteorological
35 phenomena; now, therefore, be it

36 *Resolved by the Senate and the Assembly of the State of*
37 *California, jointly,* That, due to the severity of the drought gripping
38 the western United States, the California Legislature respectfully
39 requests the President of the United States and the United States
40 Secretary of Transportation, more specifically the FAA, to allow

1 for the operation of sUAS by farmers and rangeland managers
2 pursuant to emergency rules adopted by the administration using
3 its emergency powers and before the FAA rules for sUAS are
4 finalized. The emergency rules should be based on the proposed
5 FAA rules for sUAs that were released February 2015 and that
6 incorporate all of the following:

7 (a) That the emergency FAA rules for sUAS operation be
8 applicable to counties located in the western portion of the United
9 States that are projected to be in drought during the current growing
10 season, as defined by National Oceanic and Atmospheric
11 Association's Seasonal Drought Outlook.

12 (b) That the emergency FAA rules for sUAS operation allow
13 farmers to contract with sUAS flight service providers to execute
14 missions on their behalf under the proposed FAA rules for sUAS.

15 (c) That the emergency FAA rules for sUAS operations that
16 allow universities and government agencies seeking to operate or
17 procure providers for sUAS missions for drought-related research
18 or precision management applications be given expedited approval.

19 (d) That the emergency FAA rules for sUAS operation also
20 allow farmers and rangeland managers to use sUAS imagery to
21 detect highly water-depletive invasive species on their land or
22 public lands that they manage; and be it further

23 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
24 this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United
25 States, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Majority
26 Leader of the Senate, each Senator and Representative from
27 California in the Congress of the United States, and the Federal
28 Aviation Administration.